

ARDENT SPIRITS—ARMY AND NAVY:

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

In reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 28th ultimo, in relation to allowing to the soldiers and seamen of the United States an equivalent, in money, in lieu of the present allowance for ardent spirits.

JANUARY 14, 1830.

Read, and laid upon the table.

WAR DEPARTMENT,

January 12, 1830.

In answer to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 28th of December, 1829, relative to an alteration in the ration of the Army and Navy, to non-commissioned officers, &c. I have the honor to forward the enclosed communications from the commanding general, and from the Commissary General of Subsistence, explanatory of their views upon the subject.

It is not the allowance made by the Government to the soldier, which produces his intemperance; the quantity is too small. It is occasioned by supplies of ardent spirits obtained from citizens, and which no vigilance, heretofore practised at posts, has been sufficient to prevent. The remedy suggested by the Commissary General is, perhaps, as wholesome a one as could be offered.

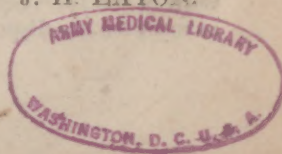
Every thing of beneficial reform, upon this subject, must be considered merely as matter of experiment. One heretofore made with a detachment of the Army, and which proved highly salutary, was to remove restraint, and permit a free and unrestrained use of ardent spirits. This privilege was conceded to the soldiers by the officer in command; and, in return for it, they consented to subject themselves to their own laws, and, accordingly, annexed particular penalties to be imposed by themselves for any improper abuse of the privilege. During three or four weeks that this plan was kept up, little of intemperance or misconduct took place. It is another of many proofs that could be adduced, to show that mankind, when under too rigid restraint, are more disposed to restiveness, and a violation of rule, than when liberally placed under the guidance of their own sense of propriety.

Very respectfully,

J. H. EATON.

To ANDREW STEVENSON,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.



HEAD QUARTERS OF THE ARMY,

WASHINGTON, January 11, 1830.

SIR: In conformity with your instructions, I have duly considered the subject presented by the resolution moved in the House of Representatives on the 28th of December, 1829, directing the Committee on Military Affairs to inquire into the expediency of inducing the soldiers of the Army, and the seamen and marines of the Navy, to voluntarily discontinue the use of whiskey, substituting for it an equivalent, to be paid in money at the expiration of the period of enlistment; also, as a further inducement to sobriety and orderly deportment in the Army and Navy, as well as with a view to preserve the lives and health of the soldiers and seamen, that said committee be instructed to inquire into the expediency and propriety of allowing an additional bounty, in money or clothing, or both, to be paid to every soldier and seaman, at the expiration of his term, who shall produce from his commanding officer a certificate of *total* abstinence from ardent spirits, and of orderly behavior, during his enlistment.

It is certain that nothing has tended so much to degrade the rank and file of the Army, as the excessive use of ardent spirit; nor has it been less destructive of their health and discipline. Any plan, therefore, that can be devised, that will be likely to eradicate the evil, is worthy of the trial. In accordance with the tenor of the resolution, I would suggest that the ration of liquor now furnished to the troops be discontinued, and, in lieu thereof, a portion of rice and molasses be issued; and, further, that a bounty of one dollar a month, to each non-commissioned officer, musician, artificer, and private soldier, be paid at the expiration of his term of service, on his producing a certificate, from his commanding officer, of *total* abstinence from the use of ardent spirits, declaring, at the same time, that he has conducted himself in an orderly manner during the term of his enlistment.

Respectfully,

ALEX. MACOMB,

Major General commanding the Army.

To the Hon. JOHN H. EATON,

Secretary of War.

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSARY GENERAL OF SUBSISTENCE,

WASHINGTON, January 6, 1830.

SIR: In relation to the resolutions of the Honorable Mr. Condict, in the House of Representatives, of the 28th of December, 1829, a copy of which has been referred to this office, respecting "the expediency of inducing the non-commissioned officers, musicians, and privates, in the Army, and the seamen and marines in the Navy of the United States, voluntarily to discontinue the use of whiskey, substituting for it a full equivalent, to be paid in money at the expiration of the period of enlistment," and offering further inducements, I have the honor to report, as far as regards the Army, that a circular letter was addressed on the 10th of August, 1820, to the Assistant Commissaries of Subsistence at all the military posts, stating that it was the wish of the then Secretary of War, the Honorable John C. Calhoun, as well as my own, to dispense with the whiskey part of the ration, and to offer to

the troops, through the commanding officers of the posts, the contract price of the whiskey ration, in money, as an equivalent for the voluntary relinquishment of said ration; the payment of which equivalent to be made either monthly or quarterly, at the option of the commanding officers, who were to appoint an officer at the post to receive and distribute the same to the troops.

This proposition was acceded to at some few posts, and at others totally rejected. At those posts where it was accepted, the practice was continued for some time, and only relinquished when it was found to be entirely of non-effect.

The accompanying copy of a letter, addressed to General P. B. Porter, late Secretary of War, upon the same subject, in reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 14th of January, 1829, I request may be considered as part of this report; and have the honor to remain,

Very respectfully,

Your most obedient servant,

GEO. GIBSON, *C. G. S.*

The Hon. JOHN H. EATON,
Secretary of War.

OFFICE OF COMMISSARY GENERAL OF SUBSISTENCE,

WASHINGTON, *January 20, 1829.*

SIR: Upon consideration of the resolution offered in the House of Representatives on the 14th instant, requesting information as to "what beneficial effects, if any, have arisen, or are likely to arise, from the daily use of spirituous liquors by the Army; and whether the consequences of that practice have not been, and will not be, injurious, and particularly upon the health, morals, and discipline of the soldiers," I have the honor to state, that I do not know of any beneficial effects from such issues, nor do I believe any are likely to arise; neither am I aware that any great evil can ensue from the daily issue of *one gill* to the troops generally, or of *one and a half gill* to men on fatigue duty. The most unhappy and pernicious effects of spirituous liquors to the Army result from its being clandestinely supplied by citizens; nor can this be totally prevented, but might be in a very great measure arrested, by inducing the States to enact laws prohibiting persons selling ardent spirits to soldiers, under the penalty of levying fines, recoverable before a justice of the peace, one half of said fines to be applied to the use of the State, and the other half to the person giving the information, and making the informant in all cases a competent witness. Could this be efficiently done, there is no doubt that the deleterious effects of the use of spirituous liquors by the Army would cease, as regards the health, morals, and discipline of the soldiers.

Very respectfully,

Your most obedient servant,

GEO. GIBSON, *C. G. S.*

Hon. PETER B. PORTER,
Secretary of War.

The troops, through the commanding officers of the posts, the highest price of the whiskey ration, in money, as an equivalent for the voluntary relinquishment of said ration; the payment of which equivalent to be made either monthly or quarterly, at the option of the commanding officers, who were to appoint an agent at the post to receive and distribute the same to the troops.

This proposition was accepted as an equitable one, and an order embodying its provisions was issued. At those posts where it was accepted, the troops were contented with their first and only relinquishment when it was found to be entirely non-effective.

The accompanying copy of a letter addressed to General H. H. Foster, the Secretary of War, upon the same subject, in reply to a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 14th of January, 1855, is respectfully recommended as part of this report, and may be found in volume 1, page 100.

Very respectfully,
Your most obedient servant,
J. M. GILBERT, JR., &c.

Very truly, your friend,
J. M. GILBERT, JR., &c.

Approved by the Secretary of War,
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